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ABSTRACT

The history of the first 40 years of the community college movement was characterized by wide variations between the professional interests of educators and the educational interests of the public, with professional rhetoric attempting to minimize any apparent conflict. By 1930, the leadership elite of the junior college movement was comprised mainly of American Association of Junior College figures and university professors of education. While this group employed a rhetoric of public service, their intention was to associate junior colleges with secondary education and to emphasize the terminal function of junior college as a way of supporting the naturally hierarchical structure of society. The public, however, supported the junior college as a source of upward mobility through access to higher education. Comparing the terminal education policies promoted by the national leadership with the actual practice of junior colleges reveals another marked incongruity, this time between leadership rhetoric and the reality of public junior colleges. While the leadership was almost uniform in insisting that the primary purpose of the junior college should be to educate semiprofessionals who would not go on to the baccalaureate, the college curriculum invariably emphasized the first 2 years of university work over terminal education and junior college students were transferring in great numbers. These realities drew strong criticism from the university community, who attacked the poor quality of teaching and were hostile to competition for freshman and sophomore students. However, neither the university critics or the junior college proponents of terminal education had much effect on the course of junior college development. (JMC)

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Conflicting Voices in the Definition of the Junior/Community College

John H. Frye

Introduction

Professional groups develop cultures and ideologies that serve their needs as a group, while their rhetoric tends to focus on the service provided to their clients. Professional faculty and staff in the community college share this characteristic with other educators and professional groups in general. The difficulties experienced by the contemporary community college in clarifying institutional purpose in the public mind can be attributed, in part, to the phenomenon that professional interests and public interests may vary while the professional rhetoric employed tends to minimize any apparent conflict.

The first 40 years of the community/junior college movement illustrates this point clearly. The leadership of the junior college movement employed a rhetoric of public service. They also intended to develop the terminal function of the junior college as the predominant one. This was not a popular view with the general public who supported the junior college as a source of upward mobility through access to higher education. The complex interaction of the national leadership, local presidents and staff, and the students and their families reveals limits on influence of the educational elite.

If the junior college is viewed as an example of educational reform, the limits on reform inherent in the American educational system are apparent. With no central control on the national

level and little at the state level, the two-year public college emerged with a character of its own, distinct from the vision developed among the national leadership.

While educators may be considered a professional group by virtue of their educational level and social standing, educators differ from other professions in substantial ways. First of all, they provide a public service as opposed to individual or personal services provided by lawyers, doctors, accountants and the like. Secondly, educators, as professionals, generally operate under the aegis of a bureaucracy -- common school, two-year college, or university -- in contrast to more traditional professions. As a result, career paths for educators differ from traditional professions and hierarchy is inherent in their functioning. Not only does age-grading imply a hierarchy -- graded common schools to university -- but within levels of institutions a clear status hierarchy of institutions has been pervasive in the twentieth century. Moreover, management of education has had higher prestige than faculty, with some caveats made for the university.

Within the occupation of educator, step laddering to a higher position, both within institutional level and between levels, is generally financially rewarding and socially fulfilling. For the two-year junior college, arising in the first years of the twentieth century, the issue of hierarchy was particularly acute. This was true both within the profession of education and in its larger social context as related to students. The idea of terminal education, promoted by the junior

college national leadership, related directly to the issue of social hierarchy, and the examination of the literature and data on this issue is revealing of social conflict within and outside the educational system.

Methodology

There is a vast literature on education in the United States. Books, articles, speeches, annual reports, statistical information, and other materials abound. The sources are not only individual writers but associations, committees, and foundations with an interest in education. From 1930 on, the American Association of Junior Colleges had its own journal, the Junior College Journal, which includes not only standard articles but anecdotal reports, excerpts from speeches and other journals, and news items on individual colleges. The Journal was controlled by a small group of prominent national figures in the junior college movement and reflects their point of view.[1] Comparing the policy promoted by the national leadership in the Journal and elsewhere with actual practice of junior colleges reveals a marked incongruity between leadership rhetoric and the reality of public junior colleges.

Professional Careers and the Leadership of the Junior College Movement

As a new educational institution the junior college opened new career opportunities for individuals in the early twentieth century. This opportunity arose at a time when numerous new

specialized occupations and professions were arising as industry and business expanded and opportunity in agriculture declined.[2] In general, education grew in size and complexity particularly the high school and lower grades. In this period, the university also underwent some expansion and continued to refine its function as a center for research and policy development. University specialists in education became particularly influential. When the American Association of Junior Colleges was founded in 1920, the pattern of organizational leaders forming intimate association with university specialists was already well established. By 1930, when the first issue of the Junior College Journal was issued, a leadership elite of association figures and professors of education was already well developed. The same pattern of speaking, writing, and employment brokering, typical of elite figures in other fields, characterized the junior college national leadership as well.[3]

By 1930, this leadership was almost uniform in promoting the junior college as a two-year terminal institution. While no leadership figure insisted on excluding the transfer function altogether, they made clear that the primary purpose of the college should be to educate students who would not go on to the baccalaureate degree. This position had to do with their social outlook as well as structural problems they faced within the educational system.

Like most educators, the junior college leadership expressed conservative views and perceived that the structure of society was naturally hierarchical. The university was thought to be an appropriate source of education for the national political and

social elite. The majority, however, could not aspire to this level and should not weaken the system by flooding into the university. On the other hand, the rising complexity of social and economic life seemed to justify the need for more education than twelve years in order to meet skilled work-force needs and local leadership requirements.

The public junior college was usually associated with a local high school and, as the thirteenth and fourteenth year, was frequently assumed to be an extension of the high school. This position was reinforced by university leaders like William Rainey Harper who argued that the freshman and sophomore years were secondary in nature and the university might be better off without them.[4] Few of the personnel in the junior college movement, either national leadership or local figures, had begun careers in the university. Almost without exception they arose from secondary or even elementary school careers.[5]

By promoting the junior college as a terminal institution, the leadership satisfied not only its ideological perception of evolving American society, but the career aspirations of junior college staff as well. If junior colleges were only or mainly for university transfer, the numbers of potential students would be small and career opportunities would be limited. On the other hand, as a terminal institution, the junior college could be designed for most, if not all, high school students and the numbers and resulting career opportunities for professional staff would be large.

The leadership developed a rationale for the terminal

program which included the idea that there was a group of occupations they labeled the semiprofessions. The junior college should educate for this level. This category was thought to reside between artisan and professional levels, but a successful definition or even agreed upon list of occupations for the semiprofessions was never achieved. The leadership was anxious to avoid the perception that terminal education was trade or vocational training because of the low social standing of these programs. They frequently spoke of terminal cultural courses and education for "social intelligence."[6]

The association with secondary education provided numerous positive advantages from the perspective of the leadership. With some distaste, one university leader observed the tendency of junior college leaders to "exploit ... numbers", emphasize growth, and promote secondary "attitudes."[7] By connecting with the high school, growth for the junior college appeared inevitable as high school enrollments were growing prodigiously. Moreover, the social outlook of the leadership, with its hierarchical bent, was satisfied with a position in the system that allowed their institution to focus on a middle social level of education and hence confirm their own social views. As one writer observed with considerable candor, it was better for the junior college to be the top of the secondary system rather than the bottom of the higher education system.[8] While the potential for growth and the security inherent in the public secondary system were positive attractions for the leadership, there were strong negative pressures from colleges and universities that posed a threat if the transfer function were emphasized.

Although leaders like Harper at the University of Chicago theorized about a European model for the university that would cut off the freshman and sophomore years, this idea never got far. President Angell of Yale University talked about this "venerable" proposal and its lip-service, but noted that it failed in practice.[9] The fact was that lower division students were financially important to universities then as they are now. University leaders and especially baccalaureate college presidents were hostile to the public junior college as a competitor even for freshman and sophomore students.

Criticism of the junior college by university leaders was common. They attacked the presumed poor quality of teaching, inadequate facilities, and, in general, the high schoolishness of such an undertaking.[10] However, as a place for a different kind of student, one not desired as a student at the university in any case, the junior college had its place. Robert Sproul, President of the University of California, set out this position with greater clarity and direction than most of his peers. For Sproul, the problem was more critical because of the size of the junior college system in California. In an address, later amplified into an article for the Junior College Journal, Sproul argued that the junior college had a place in the educational system, but in his view this was to get students to their life's work sooner and not to the university. Junior colleges "masquerading" as four year schools "are subversive of the best interests of democracy." The purpose of the university is to produce the "aristocracy" of democracy. From the junior colleges

should come not "agricultural scientists" but "farmers", not engineers but "skilled mechanics." "Non-commissioned officers in the great adventure of modern business" should be the junior colleges' chief goal. In the course of his article, Sproul quoted several national leaders of the junior college movement to support his position.[11] In fact, his statements reflect the purposes and goals of the national leadership. The reservations and criticisms of university leaders were one of the reasons the national leadership figures supported the terminal program. Many junior college leadership figures were university staff, or hoped to be. Lange, Eells, Koos and others were university professors. In addition, university presidents and staff were highly influential with state legislators. In any case, the relationship of national leadership of junior colleges and university leadership was intimate. Making enemies of universities would have been dangerous institutionally and the personal careers of junior college leaders could have been injured by animosity from figures so powerful.

The leadership proposal, to emphasize terminal education for the junior college, appeared to solve the problem of place for the junior college in the educational system. It appeared to assure large-scale and long-term growth and, as a result, create significant career opportunities for professionals in the field. The social function of the institution was explained in terms of semiprofessional occupations, social efficiency, and good citizenship. University opposition was at least muted by this position, and it was argued that the leadership position was based on a carefully though out and planned program relating the

junior college to the overall scheme of education in America. The difficulty with the leadership's proposed program was that nowhere was it followed. Students ignored terminal programs. The public was indifferent to the concept. Semiprofessions never achieve meaningful recognition as a category of occupations in the larger world. Students enrolled in transfer curriculums in consistent majorities and transferred to a university regardless of whether their programs were terminal or transfer. Local presidents might pay lip service to the idea of terminal education but ignored it in practice and did everything in their power to distance themselves and their institutions from high school and secondary education.[12]

After 1940, the rhetoric of semiprofessions, social efficiency, education for life, and other progressive education terminology began to disappear from the junior college literature. With the changes in higher education after the Second World War a different approach and rhetoric came to dominate the junior college literature.

Professional Staff in the Local Colleges and Popular Aspirations

In Sproul's article noted earlier, he had cause to observe the extreme sensitivity of junior college staff to criticism from university figures. They became "enraged," he said, at the "mildest criticism."[13] The literature is filled with evidence that faculty and staff at local junior colleges were not interested in the program of terminal education, if not actively

hostile to it. Local presidents and staff actively sought physical and administrative separation from high school, and dreaded possible unification into a high school extension system. It is not surprising that local faculty and staff wished to associate themselves and their institutions with the higher status of university and baccalaureate colleges rather than secondary schools. One wag observed the secret desire of every high school principal to be known as a (junior) college president and every high school teacher to be known as a "college" professor.[14] The sensitivity to criticism, rejection of the terminal emphasis and the association with secondary schools by local staff demonstrates the concern they had with social and professional status.

The literature is replete with grousing and complaints from the national leadership that progress was not being made with the terminal function of the junior college.[15] Educators who dealt with the public in organizing junior colleges gave little attention to terminal education. Public relations staff emphasized attracting the best students, and consultants, who helped organize new colleges, ignored the terminal concept almost entirely.[16]

The differences between leadership rhetoric and local junior college catalogs on the subject of terminal education is likewise striking. Catalogs intended for public consumption invariably emphasized the first two years of university work over terminal education. The terminal function is often ignored in catalogs.[17]

The geographic distribution of public junior colleges also contradicts the premises of those promoting terminal education.

Before 1940, public junior colleges were largely restricted to states in the Mississippi valley, Texas, and California. They clearly serve a university transfer function. Urban eastern states, where semiprofessional courses might have been expected to have their greatest appeal, generally did not establish two-year public colleges until well after the Second World War.[18]

Students perceived the junior college as the first two years of higher education. Even when enrolled in "terminal" curriculums students seemed to have no understanding of the concept and intended to transfer and did transfer in substantial numbers.[19] The evidence makes clear that the general public viewed the two-year public college as a transfer institution offering at least the hope of upward social mobility. In all the voluminous literature produced by the leadership, nowhere is evidence produced that the general public endorsed or accepted the idea that the junior college should emphasize educational preparation for second-level social and occupational positions.[20] In this respect, the terminal education program is related conceptually to the issue of tracking in the high school, and the issue reflects many of the attendant difficulties associated with tracking in terms of the potential for parental opposition. Hence, junior college movement leaders ignored terminal education when promoting local colleges to local audiences, but employed the concept in literature aimed at professional educators.

Local junior college faculty and staff rejected the terminal emphasis as did students, parents, and the local public in general. An emphasis on terminal education lowered the status of

local faculty and staff. It undoubtedly would have been difficult for local presidents to promote their colleges had they emphasized the terminal two-year secondary nature of their offerings as advocated by the national leadership. The gap illustrated here between leadership theory and local practice illustrates both underlying social conflict in a stratified but mobile society and also the conflict within a profession which was itself stratified but theoretically had "democratic" goals. The rhetoric of the national leadership could not be sustained in this environment. Whether the ideology which underlay this rhetoric was also modified is not so clear, but, after the Second World War, the rhetoric of terminal education and education for occupational level was gradually replaced by a guidance-centered student development model. Numerous critics have argued that the two year college continues to track students out of higher education which was the explicit goal of the national leadership before 1940.[21]

Impact/Conclusion

The definition of the two-year public college is not much clearer today than it was before 1940. The debate over its function and success continues. The large portion of culturally diverse, non-traditional students who begin their post-secondary education in the community college has made this debate even more acute. The commitment to equality and access, that is, social mobility, continues to frustrate leaders and public.

The solution of the national leadership before 1940 which

accepted social inequality and proposed that the junior college serve a stratification function was unacceptable then as it is now. On balance, it would appear that the leadership program of terminal education had rather little effect on the course of junior college development.

Without a centralized national structure, individual two-year colleges continued to verbalize the transfer, social opportunity function popular on the local level. In American society where social stratification is accepted but opportunity is insisted upon, the denouement of the conflict between national leadership theory and local experience exemplifies a mechanism for handling socially charged questions. The rhetoric of the professional group was modified to accommodate popular values.

The gap between professional and popular rhetoric and ideologies can result in lost opportunities, debilitating confusion, and mis-direction on both a local and national level. In the case considered here, the impact of the conflict appears limited except for the loss of opportunity that a different approach might have offered but this can not be measured. To a degree, the national junior college leaders achieved their goal of maintaining credibility with the universities through promotion of terminal education while local developments satisfied local demands for access to higher education in a more traditional frame of reference. The conflict illustrated here may be a paradigm for the failures and successes of general educational reform in the United States. The distance between

professional rhetoric and local concerns is a factor that needs to be evaluated in educational change.

NOTES

1 For a history of the American Association of Junior Colleges see Michael Brick, Forum and Focus of the Junior College Movement: The American Association of Junior Colleges New York: Teachers' College, 1964.

2 A useful summary of this process is Joseph Ben-David, "Professions in the Class system of Present Day Societies," Current Sociology 12(1963-64): 247-330.

3 See Brick, Forum and Focus ....

4 See for example L. E. Blauch, "Reorganization on European Lines Appears Imminent," School Life 9(December, 1923): 77-79.

5 John H. Frye, "Leadership Ideology and Institutional Development in the Public Junior College 1900-1940," Ph. D. diss., Loyola University of Chicago, 1990.

6 See for example Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, State of Higher Education in California, Sacamento: State of California, 1932; W. C. Eells, Why Junior College Terminal Education Washington, D.C.: American Association of Junior Colleges, 1941.

7. "Dr. Kelly Speaks," Junior College Journal 3(October, 1932): 93.

8 William Proctor, Junior College Journal 2(March, 1932): 303.

9 "President Angell's Opinion," Junior College Journal 3(January, 1933): 190; "Retain Lower Division," Junior College Journal 2(April, 1932): 384.

10 See for example Ralph T. Bishop, "The Junior College: Objections and Dangers," Junior College Journal 2(March, 1932): 318-325.

11 Robert Gordon Sproul, "Certain Aspects of the Junior College," Junior College Journal 1(February, 1931): 274-280.

12 Frye, "Leadership Ideology....," 110-119.

13 Sproul, 275.

14 Carl Holiday, "This Junior College Movement," School and Society 30(December 28, 1929): 887-888.

15 See for example Leland Medsker, "Chicago Faces the Issue on Terminal Courses," Junior College Journal 9(December, 1938): 109; Alfred Potts II, "Selection of Students for Terminal Courses," Junior College Journal 5(May, 1935): 426; Aubrey A. Douglass, "Curriculum Determinants in the Junior College." California Quarterly of Secondary Education, 4(October, 1928): 37-44.

16 See for example F.P. OBrien, "Conditions Which Justify Establishing A Junior College," School Review 34(February, 1928): 128-137; G. H. Vande Bogart, "Public Relations of the Junior College," Junior College Journal 2(April, 1932): 357-395.

17 Leonard Koos, "Current Conceptions of the Special Purposes of the Junior College," School Review 29(September, 1921): 520-529.

18 Frye, 93-101.

19 Frye, 131-137.

20 "Objectives in Duluth," Junior College Journal 6(October, 1935), 43.

21 See for example Steven Brint and Jerome Karabel, The Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985 New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; Alexander Astin, Four Critical Years: Effects of College on Beliefs Attitudes and Knowledge San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977; Fred L. Pincus, "The False Promises of Community Colleges, Class Conflict and Vocational Education," Harvard Educational Review 50(1980): 332-361.

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